



Heritage Lessons



Bringing you the People and Places of Heritage Education — Louisiana

It may seem an unlikely match—the state’s burying grounds and the increasing demands of Louisiana’s curriculum—but more than sixty teachers from Ruston to Metairie have said that they will be making use of the concepts presented in the Heritage Education – Louisiana 2004 Summer Workshops and expect to see measurable results with their students.

The workshops were held in Greenwood Cemetery in Ruston, American Cemetery in Natchitoches, the Lake Lawn Metairie Cemetery, and the Old Catholic and Old Masonic Cemeteries in Abbeville. Through their workshop and cemetery activities, teachers learned how to incorporate cemetery studies into math, science, English language arts, and social studies curriculums as well as cover archeology, historic structures, cultural landscapes and stewardship.

Janis Ament, art teacher at St. Theresa of Avila in Gon-

Grave Matters

Heritage Education—Louisiana Workshops Address
the Use of Cemeteries as Teaching Tools



Teachers from around Louisiana participated in Heritage Education workshops this summer on using cemeteries to teach classroom lessons.

zales, plans to fit the cemetery work into her teaching plan.

“The fifth grade class will research and digitally catalog the gravestones, research area history for interviews with parishioners of the church, and make presentations on their findings,” she said. “The fourth grade class will act as creative consultants and illustrate the information provided by the fifth graders.” Ament and Torrie Schexnaydre received a mini grant provided by Heritage Education — Louisiana.

What is the most important thing that Ament hopes her fourth and fifth grade students will gain from working together on this community project involving the



cemetery located on their school’s grounds? “For most of the students there are family members buried there. The students will be getting a lesson that is a little more personal than the average community project. They play on the playground by the cemetery everyday; after this project their eyes will be opened

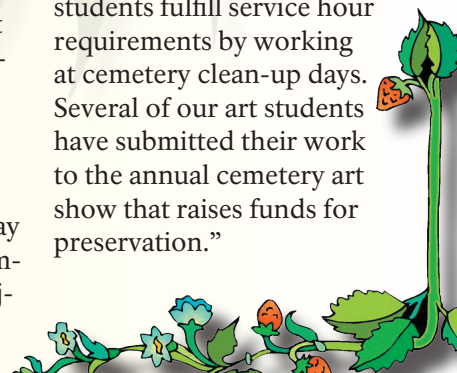
and most will likely view this cemetery in a very different way.”

Ament will be sharing her passions with her students as well as sharing what she learned at the summer workshop with other teachers in the school that will be involved with the same fourth- and fifth-grade students. She hopes that this program can grow to encompass all aspects of the student’s curriculum.

Another grant project focusing on cemeteries is one by Keiren Aucoin, librarian at Brother Martin High School. Her project has been going on for three years and has reached over 600 students.

What does Aucoin feel that her students have received from the experience? “Besides practical research experience and direct application of geographic and historical knowledge, students derive an appreciation for an often-overlooked representation of their history and become aware of the environmental conditions that accelerate the loss of these structures.

“We have now joined the Save Our Cemeteries organization and some of our students fulfill service hour requirements by working at cemetery clean-up days. Several of our art students have submitted their work to the annual cemetery art show that raises funds for preservation.”



Use Safety When Visiting a Cemetery

By Jessica Humphries
Heritage Education Intern

You may be interested in taking a class to a local cemetery for a lesson that covers history, science, English, art, or a service project. Here are some safety, cultural, and care tips to ensure a great cemetery visit for your class.

Safety

Visit a cemetery beforehand in order to plan your lesson and identify potential safety hazards.

- Be careful of uneven or sunken terrain.
- Watch for sharp or protruding objects such as tree trunks or fence posts.
- Remember that snakes, ants, and mosquitoes may be present.
- Stay clear of poison oak or ivy.
- Do not sit on or lean against monuments; they are heavy and may not be safe.
- Consider the need for sunscreen, bug spray, or rain gear.
- Mark boundaries with rope or caution tape so students know where they should and should not go.



Cemeteries can contain markers that have loose and potentially dangerous components. For your safety and for the good of the markers, don't touch.

Culture

Encourage respect for traditions, cultural differences, and services.

- Be respectful of other visitors, especially if a service is in progress.
- Be careful distinguishing between trash and mementos when cleaning up. It is common for people to leave cans, bottles, toys, or other things not so easily understood as mementos.
- In the Jewish tradition rocks or pebbles are left at gravesites as a sign of respect.
- In some traditions plants or field stones are prominent grave markers. The plant could be the only indication that the area is a gravesite.

Cemetery Care

When interest in cemeteries lead to service projects, keep certain considerations in mind.

- While it is important not to remove vegetation that is intended to be a marker or part of a gravesite, it is also important that the growth of plants and trees be monitored and controlled so monuments are not affected.
- Weed eaters and lawnmowers can

damage and chip stones. Remove weeds by hand or with scissors. Do not use chemicals which can be harmful to the stone.

- Contact a professional when cleaning or repairing a stone. Many do-it-yourself attempts at stone repair and cleaning, such as bleach, wire brushes, cement, and plaster, can actually speed along the process of deterioration.

Heritage Education does not promote doing gravestone rubbings. Leaning on the stones and applying pressure for a rubbing can cause breaks and promotes cracks. The paper and other materials used can also leave behind residues that are harmful to the stone. Instead, try one of the following:

- Take a digital picture that can be enhanced on a computer.
- Use a flashlight, mirror, or even aluminum foil to direct natural light onto a stone to better read it.
- Spray gently with water to wash away dirt.

Keeping all of these safety, cultural, and care issues in mind and communicating them to your students will make for a wonderful and exciting trip to a local cemetery for your class!



Weblinks About Cemeteries

Save Our Cemeteries:

www.saveourcemeteries.org

Assoc. for Gravestone Studies:

www.gravestonestudies.org

City of the Silent:

www.alsirat.com/silence/index.html

Rootsweb:

www.rootsweb.com